

AUDIO  
FILE

Belt-driven turntable with electronic speed control  
 Made by: Avid HiFi Ltd  
 Supplied by: Avid HiFi Ltd  
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## Avid Acutus Reference SP (£12,000)

**D**uring the past year or so Avid has been introducing 'SP' upgrades across its entire range of turntables. What we have here is the latest incarnation of its flagship, the Acutus Reference SP.

'SP' indicates external power supply, providing electronic speed switching between 33.3 and 45rpm – in this instance a new 20kg design, the 'DSP Vari-Speed supply', featuring on-board digital signal processing to control frequency

**'Leading edges of notes were sharply delineated and squeaky clean'**

generation and fine-tuning of speeds. Also common to Avid's 'SP' decks is a twin belt drive system – fiddly to fit though – that claims to help control platter dynamics and stability under load.

The Acutus' AC synchronous motor is a custom-designed hand-built unit that Avid says is around ten times more powerful than the norm, housed in its own pod and

positioned just behind the front-left spring tower.

Recent enhancements to all Avid decks include the use of a 'dry' bearing that requires no maintenance. In the Acutus a stainless steel inverted bearing shaft is tipped with a single-point self-lubricating tungsten carbide ball that sits in a sapphire cup.

A record clamp is integral to the design. Playing records without it is not an option as the brass top section of the bearing housing sits proud of the platter's bonded polymer surface.

Our review sample was fitted with an SME Series V tonearm, to which we fitted Ortofon's Cadenza Blue MC.

### TIGHT FOCUS

The Acutus Reference's overall presentation appears tightly focused and controlled. Leading edges of notes, from the soft and delicate to the loudest, most explosive crescendos, were sharply delineated and squeaky clean. Jan Garbarek's 'Molde Canticle, Part 3' from *I Took Up The Runes*

[ECM] sounded bold and powerful while possessing a beguiling coherence and effortless, relaxed feel. The melodic lines delivered by bass maestro Eberhard Weber were uncommonly easy to follow, where on lesser record players the subtle touches and inflections in his playing become all too easily blurred by the over-prominent subsonic thumps of Manu Katche's kick drum. And although Garbarek's wailing soprano saxophone can often become jarring in digital ECM recordings such as this, the sound remained lucid, silky even.

And this is not because the deck sounds smooth and mellow. Far from it, as it displays plenty of attack and zest. Sounding fast and authoritative partnered with the SME tonearm, there was joyous alacrity to Sly 'n' Robbie's rhythm section on Joe Cocker's *Sheffield Steel* [Island], while his gruff vocal delivery stood out from the production with uncommonly fine diction and projection.

When listening to 'Couldn't Bear To Be Special' from Prefab Sprout's *Swoon* album [Kitchenware] the low frequency 'thunder' effects had the kind of control one usually associates with CD replay, without an ounce of spare flesh artificially colouring the sound. The Acutus Reference makes vinyl sound not only clean but articulate too.

### VERDICT

With its fabulous detail retrieval and focused sound, the Acutus Reference SP delivers a captivating performance. Its elaborate suspension system makes it immune to the vagaries of positioning. Beautifully made, compact, easy to set up and maintain... the only reason not to want it is the cost. ☹

**ABOVE: At this exalted price level, installation will probably be done by your dealer. But Avid provides clear DIY assembly instructions – plus allen key for suspension adjustments. The three towers are laterally damped with o-rings. Only fitting the drive belts required a modicum of dexterity**

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Turntable speed error at 33.33rpm	33.35rpm (+0.04%, adjusted)
Time to audible stabilisation	4sec
Peak Wow/Flutter	0.04% / 0.02%
Rumble (silent groove, DIN B wtd)	-68.8dB
Rumble (through bearing, DIN B wtd)	-71.8dB
Hum & Noise (unwtd, rel. to 5cm/sec)	-58.3dB
Power Consumption	25W
Dimensions (WHD)	460x210x400mm